

APPALLING DISASTER.

A STATEN ISLAND FERRY-BOAT BLOWN UP. NEARLY FIFTY KILLED AND OVER SEVENTY WOUNDED—THE EXPLOSION—RESCUING THE VICTIMS—SCENES IN THE HOSPITALS AND AT THE MORGUE—HEARTRENDING SIGHTS—RECOVERING THE DEAD—CAUSE OF THE EXPLOSION—THE ENGINEER'S STATEMENT.

The terrible accident which has occurred in the neighborhood of this city for many years past a thrill of horror over the community yesterday afternoon. It was caused by the explosion of the boiler of the Staten Island ferry-boat Westfield of the Staten Island Ferry Company's line. The boat is known as "the extra boat," and is used on Sundays, on holidays, or at hours when the tide of travel sets strongly to Staten Island. She was accustomed to make three trips on Sundays, starting at 11 o'clock, 3, and 7 p. m., from the Whitehall landing, coming between the regular boats, which make hourly trips. She was about to start on her first trip, yesterday, and was two or three minutes behind her time, when the boiler exploded. There were from 200 to 250 passengers on board at the time, according to the statement of officers and the ticket-taker. Most of the passengers were congregated almost directly over the boiler, on the southern part of the boat, in order to catch the fresh breeze blowing from the north.

THE EXPLOSION.

THE FORWARD HALF OF THE BOAT BLOWN TO FRAGMENTS. Those who witnessed the explosion say that there was first a dull, crashing sound, somewhat resembling that made by a falling building, followed immediately, indeed, almost simultaneously, by the rush of escaping steam. The main deck was forced upward for a considerable distance, the beams and heavy planks torn into fragments, many of them blown high into the air, falling in a confused heap into the hold. The forward parts of the upper deck and cabins for a considerable distance were splintered and shattered. The pilot-house, directly over the boiler, was hurled into the air a distance of 50 feet or more, and in falling alighted on the hurricane deck, and was shattered. The pilot, James McGee, was in the pilot-house at the time, waiting for the boat to start. He was blown up and descended with the house, and yet, strange to say, aside from a few severe scratches and contusions, and a severe shock escaped unhurt. He could scarcely believe that he was not mortally injured as he crawled from the ruins and saw the havoc and desolation that had been made. The heavy smoke-stack was also blown high in the air and fell into the general wreck. The escaping steam for a time filled almost all parts of the boat, and many were scalded who had been otherwise escaped unhurt.

THE EXPLODED BOILER. The boiler was a low-pressure, tubular one, 24 feet long and 10 feet in diameter. It was made in 1862, in Brooklyn, at the same time that the boat was built. By the certificate on board, it appears that it was inspected on the 15th of June last, by John K. Matthews, one of the Government Inspectors of Boilers, and was pronounced by him to be in good condition. On that occasion the boiler was subjected to a hydrostatic pressure of 34 pounds to the square inch, and it was deemed safe to run it at a pressure of 25 pounds to the square inch. This certificate of inspection was registered in the Custom-House on July 15. According to the engineer's admission, the pressure just before the explosion was 27 pounds.

The force of the explosion was very great. The portion of the boiler which exploded was opposite the fire-box, and toward the bow of the boat. The upper half of the shell of the boiler, 20 feet in length, and weighing two tons or more, was torn off, and hurled a distance of 25 feet or more into the bow of the boat, where it is wedged fast. Where the starting point of the fracture was it is difficult to tell. The iron shell is torn as cleanly as though it had been composed of cloth instead of metal. In some places the torn follows a line of rivets, and in others the tough metal is torn straight through the center. The main portion of the boiler, weighing several feet out of position, lying partially across the boat, instead of in the center.

FATE OF THE PASSENGERS. It has been stated that a majority of the passengers were seated or standing on the main deck, or the upper decks, directly over the boiler. These were blown upward, some of them to a height of 25 or 30 feet, many of them, probably 40 or 50; and fell into the water. Very many of the remainder fell into the debris in the hold, and quite a number were partially buried beneath the rubbish. Those on the upper decks who had escaped unhurt fled to the stern. Michael Quigley of No. 9 State-st., and J. B. Hopkins of Newark, N. J., rescued no fewer than 11, and of these, two were infants. Other boatsmen were nearly as successful, and it is estimated that from 30 to 40 persons were taken from the water by them. It is feared, however, that from 12 to 15 persons were drowned, but owing to the confusion that prevailed, no really trustworthy estimate can be made. Those rescued were in most instances taken into the houses near the rear of the boat and several of these, in their flight, leaped to the main deck, a distance of 12 or 14 feet, and were more or less injured. The others were helped down by the deck hands and those employed in the ferry-house.

THE SCENE THAT FOLLOWED THE EXPLOSION. The crowd on board and on the pier was almost frantic. Groans and loud screams of agony came from the scalded, wounded, and dying. Parents were eagerly seeking for children, children for parents, and friends for those who were missing, and probably scalded or drowned. Attention was attracted to the track of getting out those buried under the ruins and rescuing those who were blown overboard.

RESCUING THE SUFFERERS. On learning of the disaster the Whitehall boatsmen had at once put out with small boats, and many victims were rescued by them, their wet clothing removed, and dry suits furnished. Several were badly scalded and wounded by fragments of wood. These were either taken to the hospitals, or, if their wounds were not serious, to the drug stores in the vicinity for treatment. Capt. Uman of the First Police Precinct had means taken when apprised of the terrible affair, and at once telegraphed to the Park Hospital for ambulances to convey the sufferers there. His summons was at once responded to, and extra ambulances were telegraphed for from Bellevue Hospital. Capt. Uman had also sent out an alarm of fire, calling the Fire Department to the scene. The reserve sections of police from the First, Second, Third, Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, and Twenty-seventh Precincts also responded to the call, and in an alarm of fire in the lower part of the city, and a large working force was soon formed lines and in removing the sufferers. The police immense crowd that soon congregated in the large open space outside and on the pier in the immediate vicinity, eager to see the victims as they were being rescued, and learn the particulars of the affair. Capt. Uman and the most of his force were under the ferry-gate, preserving something like order among

the half-distracted survivors, affording what information they could, and aiding to remove the dead and scalded. The members of the hook and ladder companies and details from several engine companies, under District-Engineers Brandon, Bates, and Monroe, were set to work clearing away the wreck, in order that those buried beneath might be reached while others were engaged in carrying ashore those lying in different parts of the boat. The dead were placed in the waiting-rooms until they could be removed to the Morgue. These various gangs of firemen, under the orders of their superiors, worked with a will, and after two hours or more of hard work, all were got out from beneath the mass of rubbish.

And a pitiable sight they presented. Many had the skin almost entirely scalded from their faces, necks, and breasts; others had lost portions of their hair, the scalp literally parboiled and the hair fall-out in bunches, while the raw, red flesh of their faces and breasts, where the skin had peeled off, presented a ghastly sight, such as few could look at without shuddering. All were begrimed with soot and dirt, and occasionally a jagged wound appeared through the rent clothing. It was a sight to appal one possessed of the strongest nerves. Death and suffering were present in their most terrible forms. All ages and sexes were represented among the victims. Infants and children, ranging from 3 to 10 years, were shockingly mangled and scalded.

TRANSFERRED TO THE HOSPITALS. All the coaches in the vicinity were at once pressed into service, and as fast as they arrived on the ground the scalded and wounded were placed in them and driven with all speed to the Park Hospital, the capacity of which was tested to the utmost. The most severe cases were retained there. All that could be removed with safety were transferred in the ambulances to Bellevue Hospital. Nicholas Muller, a well-known First Warder, and the owner of the Erie Railway Company at the Castle Garden Emigrant Depot, sent two of the large baggage-wagons of the Company, and in these, carefully placed on coats, shawls, etc., to make their ride more easy, many of the injured were borne to the hospitals. The large wagon belonging to the Insurance Fire Patrol of the lower district was also used for a similar purpose.

CARING FOR THE VICTIMS. As soon as the news of the disaster was circulated, the physicians in the lower part of the city hurried to the scene, and for hours were engaged in rendering unwearied assistance. These included Police Surgeon Andrews, ex-Deputy Coroner Shine, Dr. Healy, Dr. McKwan of the Eastern Hotel, Dr. Bates, and others. Dr. Amble of the Park Hospital and his assistants rendered valuable aid. The various remedies were procured in large quantities from the neighboring drug stores, and used without stint. As fast as the patients' burns or wounds were dressed they were dispatched in carriages or ambulances to the Park or Bellevue Hospitals. Not until the last sufferer was cured did these volunteers leave the scene of their labors.

SCENES ON THE NORTHFIELD. About half an hour after the explosion occurred, the steamer Northfield of the same line came up, and made fast to the bow of the Westfield and laid out on the deck or in the cabins. The dead were covered with portions of the clothing lying freely scattered around. The majority of the scalded and wounded were cared for at once by Drs. Shine, Healy, or McKwan. There were a few cases, however, where it was evident that the sufferers could not possibly survive long, and it was deemed best not to add to their agony by attempting to save them. One of these was a man about 30, apparently a mechanic, judging from his dress—although it was difficult to tell what was the texture of his dress at first sight, 30 years and begrimed it was. He was seated apparently from head to foot. The skin had literally peeled from his face, neck, and chest, and that portion of his breast displayed by his torn shirt-bosom, while through the rents in his clothing could be seen various wounds. His breast and portions of his ribs had been crushed by some heavy substance, and the wonder is that he was not killed outright, and the wonder is that he was not killed outright, and the wonder is that he was not killed outright.

He lay on the deck unconscious, and moaning, and occasionally moaned an groan or leg in his great agony. Not far away was a young man, also fearfully scalded about the face and breast. He, however, seemed to be semi-conscious, and as he moved from side to side, occasionally uttered an incoherent word. Every kind of hurt or scald was to be met with. In one of the cabins lay the dead body of a woman, and near her a little girl, apparently about 5 years old, also dead. On the other side lay a beautiful boy, about 10 months old, with a slight cut or contusion on the forehead from which the blood had welled, dabbling his golden hair, and there was also a bad scald on the little fellow's breast. Nevertheless, the attendant physician thought there was little doubt that he would recover, his injuries being superficial. Some thoughtful, kindly person, probably possessing one of the same age as at home, had procured a long cushion and carefully placed the little sufferer on it. As he lay there moaning, and occasionally breaking out into a pitiful wail, there was scarcely one of the bystanders who was not moved to tears by this exhibition of infantile suffering. Who he was or what had become of his parents, no one seemed to know. He was subsequently removed to one of the hospitals.

AT THE NEW-ST. POLICE STATION. Many of the scalded were taken to the New-st. Police Station by their friends. Sergeants Ransfield and McDevine were in charge, and exerted themselves to the utmost to afford aid to those who came there. Supplies of the kind needed were procured from the neighboring drug stores, and were applied by Police Surgeon Andrews or Dr. Amble, or under their directions. Several of these persons were taken to the hospital in carriages or ambulances, several dead bodies were taken to the station-house and subsequently removed to the Morgue.

CAUSE OF THE EXPLOSION.

It is exceedingly doubtful whether the cause of the explosion will ever be ascertained. The officers of the Company claim that the boiler was made of the best material, and having been so lately inspected, they cannot account for the explosion. The engineer, Harry Robinson, a mulatto, has been in the employ of the Company for several years. He is said to have been a very careful, steady man, in whom every confidence was placed by his superiors. He was on board of another boat immediately after the explosion, probably fearing that the survivors would leave him if he remained on the Westfield, and became known to the crowd. In conversation with one of the officers of the boat on which he took refuge, he stated that he could not account for the explosion. It was not owing to the lack of water in the boiler, because, on leaving Staten Island, there were four buckets of water, and a sufficient time had not elapsed to work down to more than three at the utmost. 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